

This week, the House Armed Services Committee had the opportunity to weigh in on the important missions and priorities of our nation's armed forces during consideration of the annual defense legislation, the Fiscal Year 2012 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This bill includes many important provisions that ensure our service members and their families have the resources and support they need and deserve. It also mandates more efficient use of taxpayer dollars by the Department of Defense (DoD), requiring improvements to the Pentagon's accounting and financial management systems. These improvements will allow the DoD to operate more efficiently during a time in which we must reduce budgets to deal with our deficits and national debt, even as our troops are posted in multiple areas overseas including Iraq and Afghanistan.

Our service men and women are sacrificing so much as they serve overseas, and it is imperative that we provide them with all of the tools that they need to get the job done. While this year's NDAA isn't perfect, I ultimately voted for it because I believe it is essential to provide for our nation's heroes – the men and women serving in harm's way all over the world in defense of our freedom and liberties. We must make sure that we do not target our veterans' programs unfairly as we cut government spending. I remain adamantly opposed to raising TRICARE fees or premiums on our veterans. Our veterans should not be the first folks to whom we turn to pay for our budget problems. I have long held the belief that the benefits afforded our men and women in uniform have been earned through sacrifice and hardship. One of the most important promises we provide to our military retirees is the medical benefit. It is our job to protect the TRICARE system now and for future generations, as it is unique and designed to fulfill certain requirements that are not shared by the private sector. Any changes to TRICARE to reduce costs should be made for those folks that are coming into the military not for those that have already served this nation. I will continue to fight for our military and veterans as the NDAA is considered by the House of Representatives in the near future.

Our country's defense has received added attention in the wake of the death of Osama bin Laden. His death was a significant moment for the United States and the Global War on Terror, and I commend the special operations forces for their bravery and success and our intelligence communities for their patience and persistence. The determination and skill of the U.S. intelligence community was also highlighted as a result of the assault on bin Laden's compound. Starting with just a nickname for a trusted courier of the terrorist leader, the CIA and other agencies were able to follow one lead after another until eventually discovering the mysterious compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Without the persistence and highly devoted efforts of those in our intelligence community, bin Laden would still be at the head of the Al Qaeda terrorist network. This was a huge milestone; however, we still have significant work left in combating extremism in order to protect our country from those who wish to do us harm.

I kept these thoughts in mind this past week as the House of Representatives considered H.R. 754, the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011. This bill is the primary vehicle through which Congress provides oversight for the activities of the intelligence community as well as foreign intelligence activities in the DoD, State Department, and Homeland Security Department. An intelligence authorization bill hasn't been passed into law in six years, which seriously weakens Congress' role in providing oversight of the intelligence organizations. It is simply imperative that we equip our intelligence community with the resources it needs to track down terrorist networks and other groups who wish to harm the United States. I was proud to support this legislation and encourage its swift passage by the Senate.

As always, I welcome your thoughts and input. Please continue to contact me through my website, www.wittman.house.gov , by phone at 202-225-4261 or follow me on Facebook (www.facebook.com/reprobwittman and Twitter (www.twitter.com/robwittman).